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## Library Leaders Needed: Yes, Please Apply

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## Library Leaders Needed: Yes, Please Apply

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### Introduction

Libraries, bookstores, Amazon.com, and BarnesandNoble.com are filled with titles containing the word leadership. A subject search in *WorldCat* using the word *leadership* retrieves 94,898 books, articles, Internet sites, and other media (WorldCat 2009). Considering the number of these written about leadership, we must be leadership experts! Leadership, however, is complex and we cannot even agree on what it is. In 1978, there were over 130 different definitions of leadership (Burns 1978). And, more have been added in the last thirty years. Definitions of leadership include:

- “Leadership is service” (Lao Tzu six century B.C.).
- “A leader is the most able man in the country. Find him and raise him to the supreme place and loyally reverence him” (Carlyle 1902).
- “Leadership is an exchange between leaders and followers. If the follower does what the leader wants, the follower gets rewarded. Punishment comes if the follower does not do what the leader wants” (Burns 1978).
- “Leadership is human (symbolic) communication which modifies the attitudes and behaviors of others in order to meet group goals and needs ” (Hackman and Johnson 1991).
- “Leaders are always made, not born. There is no genetic marker for leadership.” (Bennis 1997).

### Leadership Needed

Although a definitive definition is illusive, the idea that we desperately need leaders is not. In 1978, James MacGregor Burns wrote, “One of the most universal cravings of our time is a hunger for compelling and creative leadership” (1). In 1997, University President, Warren Bennis, wrote ...“we’re in desperate need of leaders. Unfortunately, it is increasing difficult to find men and women of vision who are willing to stand on principle and make their voices heard. One has to wonder, where have all the leaders gone?” (Bennis 1997, 17). Bennis contends that the leadership crisis is in all organizations. In 2007, almost thirty years after Burns’ message, former Chairman of Chrysler Corporation, Lee Iacocca, asks “Where are the voices of leaders who can inspire us to action and make us stand taller?” (Iacocca 2007, 5).

### Literature Review

Library literature is filled with articles and books identifying effective leadership styles, successful leadership attributes and interviews with library directors. Peter Herson provides an overview of this material in *Making a Difference in Leadership of Academic Libraries* (Herson 2007, 61-64). Literature exists also that identifies leadership competencies (Ammons-Stephens, et al 2009; Herson, Powell, Young, 2001, 2002; Herson, Powell, Young 2003). Challenges that academic library directors experience

as the directors and their supervisors perceive them is the focus of research by this article's author (McElrath 2002).

Several articles focus on helping people in non-leadership roles working in academic libraries to develop leadership skills. In 2009, Christopher Raab identified the R.O.L.L Matrix, a “holistic, geographically tiered approach to identifying leadership opportunities for academic librarians” (Raab 2009, 80). The matrix includes short term and long term departmental/library opportunities, college/community opportunities, state/regional opportunities, and national/international opportunities for academic librarians who do not have formal leadership. Merrill, Alex N. and Elizabeth Blakesley Lindsay write about the Washington State University (WSU) Libraries' program to “encourage more people to feel confident leading committees or initiatives” (Merrill 2009, 85). The program consists of an introductory session, readings, presentation about leadership styles, case study and group discussions. Program evaluation revealed that the program was a valuable leadership learning experience as well as served as a “team-building experience” (Merrill 2009, 87). Additionally, Shirley K. Baker focuses on academic librarians in her article, “Leading from Below; Or Risking Getting Fired.” She focuses on academic librarians without formal leadership roles. She identifies four principles for people without formal leadership roles to follow. They are: “Do your job well,” “Know when to let go,” “Be interested in the bigger picture,” and “Use the power you have” (Baker 1995, 238).

Given the cries for missing leaders, are there people working within libraries already who want to lead but just do not know how? Little has been written about how to develop one's own leadership skills when one is working without a formal leadership role in various library types. This article will help fill the void by providing some history of leadership, discuss leadership characteristics and skills, and provide practical tips on how a person working at any level in an organization can develop their own leadership skills.

## History of Leadership

Leadership has a long history and has been studied for centuries. In the sixth century B.C., Lao Tzu, a Chinese sage, wrote *Tao Te Ching* (translated *How Things Work*) in which he writes:

“Enlightened leadership is service, not selfishness. The leader acts so that all will benefit and serves well regardless of the rate of pay. The leader speaks simply and honestly and intervenes in order to shed light and create harmony. Because the leader does not push, the group does not resent or resist. The leader's presence is felt but often the group runs itself” (Tzu, 69-79).

Additionally, Lao Tzu tells us that if a leader “does not trust a person's process, that person will not trust you” (Tzu, 79).

About the same time in 429-347 B.C., Plato called for philosopher kings to be the leaders. He thought that certain men ought to study philosophy and become the leaders. Others are not meant to study philosophy and are born to be followers. The leader should be a protector for his followers (Plato 60-63). Moving forward in history to 1513, Niccolo Machiavelli wrote *The Prince*, a classic on the pragmatic use of power. He thought that a leader should get power and keep it by any means they can. He stressed that it is fine to pretend to be good and have noble characteristics but it is not important to actually be good or noble (Wren 1995, 67-69). In 1902, Thomas Carlyle advocated finding the “Most Able Man” in the country and raising him to be the ruler. This will provide the best government for that country according to Carlyle (Carlyle, 53-54).

From examining these historical examples of views about leadership, two ideas emerge: first, there are very different views of leadership; second, they all convey the idea that leaders are different somehow from everyone else. It has been intuitively appealing to conclude that there are certain leadership traits or characteristics that are needed in leaders. Not surprisingly, when leadership was first studied scientifically, one of the first approaches to studying leaders was to examine their traits. As

researchers studied leadership traits, certain traits were found to be present in leaders. For example, greater height, weight, and attractiveness are physical characteristics that have been used to describe a leader (Rue and Byars 2009, 287-288).

In addition to traits, leaders' actions and behaviors were studied. Three categories of leaders' styles emerged from this research. Some leaders are autocratic--they tell followers what to do and how to do it. Other leaders are said to be democratic--they invite input from their followers and use it. The last group is called *laisse faire* leaders--they let their followers do whatever they want (Rue and Byars 2009, 288)

In 1969, the Situational Approach to Leadership was developed by Paul Hersey and Kenneth Blanchard. Hersey and Blanchard suggested that some situations call for one leadership style rather than another. And, they argued that the best leaders use a combination of styles depending on the situation and followers needs (Rue and Byars 2009, 294). This is important to the study of leadership because these researchers are not just looking at leaders, now they are examining the situation and followers as part of leadership.

The final approach included in this article is one described in 1991 by Michael Hackman and Craig E. Johnson. According to them, leadership is best understood from a communication standpoint (Hackman and Johnson, 428). They define leadership as "human (symbolic) communication which modifies the attitudes and behaviors of others in order to meet group goals and needs." One important aspect of Hackman's and Johnson's approach is that "Viewing leadership from a communication perspective recognizes that leadership effectiveness depends on developing effective communication skills" (Hackman and Johnson, 428-431). They assert that from a communication standpoint, leaders are made and not born. The importance gleaned from their approach is that communication skills can be learned and/or improved upon, therefore, it is logical to assume that anyone could improve leadership skills if they are willing to learn better communication skills.

### **Some Leadership Characteristics and Skills**

There are numerous authors who write about leadership and leadership characteristics and skills. Warren Bennis relates that there are sharp differences between being a leader and being a manager. He shares that:

- The manager administers; the leader innovates.
- The manager is a copy; the leader is an original.
- The manager maintains; the leader develops.
- The manager relies on control; the leader inspires trust.
- The manager has a short-range view; the leader has a long-range perspective.
- The manager asks how and when; the leader asks what and why.
- The manager has his or her eye on the bottom line; the leader has his or her eye on the horizon.
- The manager accepts the status quo; the leader challenges it.
- The manager is the classic good soldier; the leader is his or her own person.
- The manager does things right; the leader does the right thing (Bennis 1999, 64).
- Bennis tells us that leaders have a "guiding purpose, an overarching vision" that they share with their followers (Bennis 1999, 64). But he also stresses that "unless a vision is sustained by action, it quickly turns to ashes" (Bennis 1999, 11).

Lee Iacocca draws from his "leadership from the top" experience to identify characteristics of leadership. He developed the "Nine C's of Leadership:"

1. A leader shows **CURIOSITY**. Listen to people who do not agree with you. Have curiosity about the world beyond your comfort zone.
2. A leader is **CREATIVE**. Leadership is all about managing change. She/he tries something different. Iacocca stresses the importance of “thinking outside the box.”
3. A leader must be able to **COMMUNICATE**. “Communication has to start with telling the truth, even when it’s painful.” It is most important that “leaders must face reality and tell the truth.”
4. Be a person of **CHARACTER**. “Having Character means knowing the difference between right and wrong and having the guts to do the right thing.”
5. Must have **CONVICTION** —a fire in your belly. Must have passion and really want to get something done.
6. Must have **CHARISMA**. It is the ability to inspire. People follow a leader because they trust him.
7. Must be **COMPETENT**. A leader has to be a problem solver. You have to know what you are doing. More important than that, you’ve got to surround yourself with people who know what they’re doing.
8. Must have **COMMON SENSE**. A person’s ability to reason and using common sense is the best thing going for you.
9. **CRISIS** is the biggest C, according to Iacocca. “Leaders are made, not born. Leadership is forged in times of crisis (Iacocca 2007, 8-10).

It is interesting to note the degree of overlap among Bennis' and Iacocca's characteristics. For example, they both identify the ability of acquiring followers' trust as an essential leadership characteristic as well as the characteristic of knowing and doing the right thing. Additionally, they recognize the need for a vision that is communicated to followers.

### Acquiring Leadership Skills

The strong leaders required to develop and lead future libraries will need leadership skills to address challenges in times of change. The last ten years have seen much change in libraries and information centers—the next ten promise even more change. “The speed with which change and innovation happen is forcing organizations to abandon their top-down processes, and the new information channels allow decisions to be taken nearer to the coalface and quicker” (Bennis, xiii, 2003). Additionally, Shirley Baker, Vice Chancellor for Scholarly Resources and Dean of Libraries at Washington State University, states that “while formal leadership opportunities may be few, informal opportunities are many” (Baker 1995,238). This means employees working at all levels of the organization, not just the titled leaders, will be making decisions that affect the library’s mission and future. Employees working at all levels of an organization, therefore, will need to develop the leadership skills to make these decisions. “Servant Leadership” is how Robert Greenleaf describes this type of leadership in his theory of leadership. He explains that the “servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is leader *first*, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions” (Greenleaf, 918-23). If you want to serve first, you can be the leader that Greenleaf calls a “Servant Leader.” You can influence others and lead from where you are in the organization.

### Tips for Developing Leadership Skills

First, you must decide you want to be a leader. This is a conscious decision. The good news is that today we know leaders come in all sizes, shapes and characteristics. And, the good news is the idea that leaders are born not made is no longer the only perspective. If a person wants to be a leader, she/he can work to improve the leadership skills they have already and to learn other leadership skills (Cronin, 1984; Bennis, 2003; Iacocca, 2007).

Second, learn yourself. Take inventory of your leadership skills and characteristics. Review Bennis' and Iacocca's lists of skills and characteristics. Decide what skills and characteristics you already

have but need to improve. Explore opportunities to gain that improvement. Decide what areas are weak or non-existent that you need to develop. Explore opportunities for acquiring these characteristics and skills. Then, take action to begin working on these.

Third, both Bennis and Iacocca stress the need for good communication skills. Visions must be shared so others will take action needed for the vision to become a reality. You must improve your communication skills so you can share your vision with others in your group. Start with practicing communication skills by making a promise to yourself that at each future meeting, party, or gathering of people whom you do not know you will walk up to three strangers and introduce yourself. Then ask them a question, compliment them about something, or make a comment about the gathering. This is not easy for most of us. After meeting the three “not-so-strangers now,” you can leave. Reflect on what happened after you leave. Like anything you practice, this gets easier. Additional ways to develop communication skills include volunteering for a small presentation, taking a speech class or joining a Toastmasters' Club.

Fourth, Bennis and Iacocca both talk about inspiring trust. Co-workers trust someone they respect. They trust someone who is knowledgeable and capable in their job, has a good work ethic, and who “does the right thing.” Practice these characteristics. Are you always late to meetings or work? Get a good book on Time Management and begin using good time management skills. Is there a skill you need to polish to be knowledgeable? Take a class or buy a book to help you develop the skill. Doing the “right thing” takes courage and character. Both of which can be developed. Read about leadership in literature beyond librarianship. A great deal can be learned about leadership from business, educational and leadership journals and books.

Finally, practice “thinking outside the box.” One way to do this is to ask “what and why” when changes are presented. Do it nicely, of course. This will help you develop critical thinking skills needed for leadership. The answers to the “what and why” questions can help you see the bigger picture. When you see the bigger picture, you can offer your own knowledgeable suggestions so a change can occur more successfully. Then share your vision with your group. Remember that leaders have the “ability to make things happen through others” (Baker 1995, 238). Look for opportunities in your own workgroup to practice using your leadership skills.

### **Conclusion: Leaders of the Future**

What will the leaders of the future look like? Michele Darling predicts the leader of the future will mentor, encourage, guide and support rather than “bark orders.” Leaders will have to be able to “share vision, a sense of purpose and direction” (Darling, 477). Darling stresses that “Power doesn't accrue to those who hoard it. Real power is obtained only by those who give it away” (Darling, 477). The idea of Robert Greenleaf's Servant Leadership, mentioned earlier in the article, seems to bring us full circle back to Lao Tzu in the sixth century B.C. When those little nagging doubts about what leadership is and if that you really can be a leader surface, think again of Lao Tzu. Tzu who says of leaders:

“A leader is best when people barely know that he exists, not so good when people obey and acclaim him, worse when they despise him. ‘Fail to honor people, they fail to honor you;’ but of a good leader, who talks little, when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say, ‘We did it ourselves’” (Tzu, 30).

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